

How to attract students to international summer school in Tampere?

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An attractive and successful summer school in Tampere offers studies with possibility to earn credits and lots of social programme in the city and nature of Tampere Region. According to a study, the most interesting courses offered to international students are the courses starting with “Finnish” – like Finnish language and culture, Finnish business, Finnish-Russia business co-operation, Finnish food, tourism and nature. International students wish to meet with Finnish students, Finnish companies and get to know Finnish products and services.

Based on my Master’s Thesis and study the most convenient time to organise a summer school is definitely the month of August and for 2 weeks. The best way to reach the international students are quite traditional: using email, internet pages and Facebook. Some students mentioned though friends, teachers, and their own university. Other social media channels did not occur very important in reaching the students and potential new students. To conclude, marketing is definitely a continuous process, needs to have a strategy and plan and right resourcing. Marketing material and information about the courses are expected 6–12 months before the summer school starts. Dutch specialists Torenbeek & Meurs (2012) on European summer schools recommend a planning phase of 12-18 months for summer schools with overlapping activities. (Helsky-Lehtola, U. 2015)

International Summer Schools in Finland

As a matter of fact, Finland does not have a long history in organising summer schools. According to Torenbeek & Meurs (2012), the idea of summer schools first came from the United States to Europe. The Finns, however, do have a long background in having a relatively long summer holiday as young people were needed to work in agricultural areas in the summer periods. These days there are unfortunately not that many summer jobs available for students, so it would be a very good idea to promote studies during the summer, too. According to Statistics Finland's Education Statistics, employment among students decreased by two percentage points in 2013 from the previous year. Slightly more than half of the students were actually employed during their studies. (Statistics Finland 2015.)

The Ministry of Education and Culture expects to have more opportunities for students and in all HEI’s to study during the summer season. Some of the studies could be independent studies, but also various possibilities through open university, digital studies, laboratory work, summer school, summer exams etc. There is a great amount of demand for the summer studies as the economic depression affects the employment situation among young people. Consequently, the use of the latest technology should be taken more into consideration in promoting the summer studies. Some obstacles for this development are, for example, the long holiday culture among teachers in Finland, insufficient human resources, insufficient co-operation between the HEI’s, rather poor communication about the summer studies etc. (Ministry of Education 2015).

A common portal for studying countrywide in the summer schools in Finland was easily found with a google search and with the search words “summer school Finland”. The common portal “Study in Finland” <http://www.studyinfinland.fi/> is kept up by the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) in Helsinki. All the HEI’s offering summer schools are also mentioned on the CIMO internet pages. (Study in Finland 2015)

The Ministry of Education and Culture decided in January 2014 to start a project of full year round studies in the HEI's utilising especially digital learning environments and versatile study methods. (Valtioneuvosto 2015.)

International Summer Schools in Europe

Institutions of higher education could see summer schools as a key to strengthen their international activities and their competitiveness. Summer schools require a very different approach compared to the regular courses and programmes during the academic year. There are many types of summer schools in Europe as there are different institutions of higher education. Target groups for a summer school might be the already existing university students or other target groups. The structure of summer school also varies from one programme to a number of programmes, to own students and/or international students. Summer schools reflect to the needs of students as they offer a possibility to stay abroad and students can mostly profit from new, international experience and earn study credits at the same time. (Torenbeek & Meurs 2012.)

Summer schools could be seen as an invitation to international partners to establish partnerships and relationships. Summer schools can also be seen as kick-start to new co-operation with a new exchange partner with the university. Summer school programmes could be used to attract new students to the university or prepare them for the coming academic year. Moreover, summer schools can positively contribute to the university's financial situation both directly and indirectly. Summer schools can prevent school drop-outs as summer schools could offer so-called "catch-up" education as the students are facing an increasing pressure factor to graduate on time and, therefore, summer schools offer the possibility to achieve extra course credits. (Torenbeek & Meurs 2012.)

The most important stakeholders are the students themselves, but their parents play an important role as well. Together they form a very important stakeholder group. The majority of the European summer school students look for a combination of study and holiday. Nowadays almost all the students also want to get credits from their summer studies (ECTS European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). All students wish to have a social aspect and social programme in the summer school, regardless of nationality, culture or background. One major attraction of the summer school is the mixture of cultures, different customs and traditions. (Torenbeek & Meurs 2012.)

It is extremely important to have a clear organisational model for the summer school. The programming, the timetable and the structure of the days should look the same for all students. The summer school staff, both academic and administrative, need special skills to make the summer school successful.

Torenbeek & Meurs apply the very same principles to summer schools than the international office staff. Team spirit, flexibility, and an open mind are crucial for the summer school office. The summer school must have a director, a person in charge. Director might be the facilitator and co-ordinator or have a direct hands-on role. Director obviously needs to be excellent in networking, inside the institution and abroad. The director must have leadership, coaching and encouragement skills. Other people working for the summer school office must be team players. The staff needs to be flexible as the tasks are seasonal and demand a different level of attention at different times of the year. The staff needs to be highly trained, professional and extremely versatile people with a high level of intellect and initiative. Another absolute demand is their high level of English and ideally some other

language skills, too. Most of the communication of summer schools purely depends on the website. (Torenbeek & Meurs 2012.)

Close marketing co-operation in Tampere Region

International talents represent a growing source of international competence and workforce that local firms need in the future. Tampere region is there for concentrating in its investment attraction activities to brand the city region as an attractive place to study, live and work for international talents. International well-known and place branding are the tools to enhance the attractiveness of the Tampere city region in the eyes of investors, talents and tourists. (Taverne 2015.)

Many students answered that they were interested in Tampere as a city and in Finland as a country, so the cooperation with Finnish and Tampere Region tourism officials like Tampere Event Office, City of Tampere, and TREDEA (= Tampere Region Economic Development Agency) is important too. Especially Talent Tampere network and programme by TREDEA (Linking Bright Business with Internationals) concentrates also in integration and attraction issues of HE students. I am a volunteer in Tampere – All Bright! Ambassador network myself as a part of Tampere All Bright Ambassador Network (organized by TREDEA). In this network also the issues of integration, working and studying internationally and talent attraction in Tampere Region are discussed and developed. Tampere Region would get more tourists to Tampere in summer and summer school would get more students – at its best this could be a win-win situation to the regional tourism, and to TAMK and other universities in Tampere. Most of the summer school students stay in Tampere to study a degree and some of them stay to live after the graduation.

Tredea (2015a) writes in their website in Talent section about Tampere the following:

In addition to its beauty, excellent location and attractiveness, Tampere, the jewel of Pirkanmaa, is also the student friendliest city of Finland. Student friendliness is visible in Tampere in students' significant share in building the city culture, in the construction of the city around its three universities and also in the political activeness of the students. Student friendliness is a central theme of the city's development strategy. With its 35 000 university students Tampere is a true student city.

Tredea sees the combination of talent attraction and talent visibility as the key resource in investment attraction activities. From Tredea's point of view talents attract investments and this is how Tredea (2015b) writes in their Invest section about Tampere:

Talented, experienced and loyal workforce provides good value for money

Students generate the basic impulse for the renewal of cities. One in five of the inhabitants of Tampere is a student in higher education. After they graduate, they stay in the region because their presence is exactly why companies locate here – the skilled workforce."

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